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Attorney Lauds U2 Pilot Powers

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LEXINGTON, Va. — Gary Powers was praised as a hero last night by John C. Parker, one of the three attorneys appointed to defend the U2 pilot at his Moscow trial.

Parker addressed an audience at the Washington and Lee University Law School.

Though puzzled by Powers' statements at the trial that he was "deeply repentant" and "profoundly sorry" for the flight, and that he had performed "a very bad service" for his country, Parker said he was satisfied with Powers' later explanation of those statements.

Since his return from Russian imprisonment, Powers explained such statements by saying he did not mean them in the same way the Russians interpreted them.

"If I really had tried to represent him, and if he'd done what I thought he should have done," Parker said of Powers, "I probably would never have known what happened" (on the flight and subsequently).

"If he'd been a Nathan Hale, I would never have heard of him. He would never have been brought to trial, he would have died, or brought to a secret trial," Parker said.

Furthermore, he said, if Powers had emulated Nathan Hale, "He would have violated his instructions from the CIA."

An innocent plea is unheard of in Russia, Parker said. "People are just not brought to trial if there is any chance of their being found not guilty."

Parker also said that he and the other Virginia attorneys appointed by the State Bar Association to defend Powers believe they may have helped lighten the sentence against him.

Though denied access to Powers before and during the trial (Parker, who did not go to Russia, still has never met nor seen Powers in person), Parker said the Virginia lawyers believe the Russian defense attorney used parts of their defensive tactics.

The American lawyers based their defense on the fact Powers was not deceitful—he did not use another name and he flew openly in an easily identifiable airplane on a photographic mission on orders of the United States.

The lawyers also had photographs designed to show Powers as a "common" man from the small, rural community of Pound, and not a "capitalistic warmonger."

While the trial was definitely a propaganda show, when compared against what Americans consider a trial, it still was a justifiable trial under the Russian legal code, Parker said.